



Launching a Skills Revolution

Labour's plan for a living wage and investing in skills

Our commitments

- **Create 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places over the next five years.** We will also develop an additional 60 apprenticeship types to ensure a far broader range of possibilities for young people.
- **Introduce 100,000 new free part-time education places.** These will be provided through the Springboard, Momentum and eCollege programmes. They will ensure that people already in work can afford to upskill and develop their career prospects.
- **Improve third level funding and access.** As we await the findings of the Expert Group on Higher Education Funding, Labour will reduce the student contribution by €500, invest in demographic and staff funding and set aside €60m for postgraduate support.
- **Direct the Low Pay Commission to target a Minimum Wage of 60% of median earnings by 2021.** This would be €11.30 per hour in today's value. Government will lead by example - we will make the State a living wage employer by 2018.

IN GOVERNMENT, LABOUR RADICALLY REFORMED FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOLAS AND THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS. WE ESTABLISHED THE APPRENTICESHIP COUNCIL TO EXPAND APPRENTICESHIPS INTO NEW SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY AND CREATE 21ST CENTURY APPRENTICESHIPS



INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Ireland was faced with rising joblessness, an unemployment rate that had yet to peak, significant numbers emigrating out of the country, a collapsed apprenticeship system and a paralysis in recruitment both in the public and private sectors. Four years on, 140,000 net new jobs have been created, over 99% of these are in full time work and the unemployment rate has fallen to 8.6%.

The key to reaching full employment and maintaining it is to invest in people. This means investing in those currently at work and in those who will be the workers of the future, including those who don't go to third level, those who leave school early and those who struggle to find employment after studying. Three out of every five of those currently in work will still be of working age in 20 years time. We have to provide opportunities to train and up-skill to allow people to adapt to the changes and demands of the labour market.

In Government, Labour radically reformed further education and training through the establishment of SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards. We established the Apprenticeship Council to expand apprenticeships into new sectors of the economy and create 21st century apprenticeships. We also pioneered the Skills to Work initiative which brought together key programmes and gave jobseekers access to training, work experience and job opportunities.

A good job requires a decent wage which allows a decent standard of living or better, without having to depend on State supports.

Labour has made work pay by reversing Fianna Fáil's cut to the Minimum Wage and delivering a further increase in 2016. We reinstated Joint Labour Committees, registered employment agreements and the new concept of Sectoral Employment Orders, crucial mechanisms which help workers secure better pay and conditions and which will potentially benefit more than 200,000 people. Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement we are unwinding Fianna Fáil's public sector pay cuts, and doing so in a progressive fashion by focusing on the lowest-paid public servants first.

50,000 apprenticeships and traineeships

Over recent decades, the number of people going straight to college from school has continued to rise – we have one of the best educated populations in the developed world. But college isn't the right fit for every young person, and doesn't prepare people for every type of job. Across the developed world, apprenticeships and traineeships provide a valid and valued alternative to college. They allow people to prepare for stable and sustainable careers.

In Government, we carried out a review of apprenticeships in Ireland, and began to move beyond a focus solely on construction-related trades. We have developed 21st century apprenticeships in 25 new areas, including catering, financial services and ICT – meaning over 4,000 people will begin apprenticeships in 2016, compared to just 1,200 in 2012.

Over the next five years, we will develop 60 new types of apprenticeships and create 50,000 new opportunities in apprenticeships and traineeships. We will ensure that apprenticeships are available to young jobseekers, and also to those who want to reach the top of their professions. We will make sure that people can progress from apprenticeships to higher education, and vice versa, and make work placements a central element of all college courses.

There must be greater integration between apprenticeships and the third level education system. The 25 new apprenticeships which have been designed and developed range from level 5 to level 9 on the national framework for qualifications. Over the next five years, Labour will work to establish streamlined progression pathways from apprenticeships to third level education.

Apprenticeships cannot just be confined to young persons and must also be a key part of second chance education. We will work to establish mechanisms to recognise prior learning so that experienced workers can build on skills and experience already

acquired to transition to formal apprenticeship programme.

We will phase out the JobBridge and Gateway schemes to reflect the needs of the post-crisis labour market. Both schemes achieved a lot as crisis measures, but there is no need for them to become permanent features of our economy. We will increase the number of places on JobsPlus by 10,000 to meet the needs of the long-term unemployed, and set up a one stop shop for education and training advice centres attached to the INTREO offices so that access to guidance on careers and courses is not confined to the unemployed.

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We will require all full-time courses in both further and higher education to incorporate work placements, so that everyone leaves college with valuable work experience.

Free part-time 3rd level education for those at work

At the heart of Labour's project is a commitment to supporting working people in

their ambition to progress, and to improve their livelihoods for the benefit of themselves and their families. It is about insuring them from future unemployment and about providing them with the opportunities to do better.

Over the past five years, Labour's focus has rightly been on getting people back to work. It is now time to extend our focus to those already in employment. Through Skillnets programmes around the country, the state and employers share the cost of workplace training. Labour supports this scheme but we also recognise that there is a limit to what employer-led training will achieve.

For low skilled workers employed in low margin sectors, the likelihood of receiving employer-funded training is much lower. The State has to play an active part in supporting workers who wish to upskill or retrain in their own time. This will involve offering a greater number of part time courses in higher education, as well as on further education and training courses.

Labour in Government has provided over 40,000 opportunities through Momentum and Springboard, giving people free access to courses that will help them find employment in growing sectors such as logistics, data analytics or financial services. The SOLAS-run eCollege offers those who are out of work free access to accredited, industry-relevant courses in areas such as project management and network engineering.

We will now refocus these programmes to support those who want to reskill as well as those who are out of work, and make a total of 100,000 free part-time places available through Momentum, Springboard and eCollege by 2021.

Access to higher education

College provides young people with incredible opportunities. No young person should miss out on those opportunities because of an inability to pay.

In Government, we have protected and enhanced the student hardship fund. We

remain committed to ensuring that cost is not a barrier for entry to third-level education. We established an expert group to advise on future funding of higher education.

We will take four immediate actions to begin to address higher education funding. We recognise that it must be made more affordable, and that we need to invest in a system that can give the quality opportunities our young people deserve.

Our spending plans for the next five years include increased demographic funding of €15m each year so that the rising numbers of students doesn't lead to a reduction in quality. In 2017, we will reduce the student contribution by €500, replacing this element of the student contribution with state funding.

We will provide an initial €25m to third-level institutions to improve staff-student ratios. These actions will be taken pending the publication of the options to be presented by the Expert Group on Higher Education Funding, which will require a national discussion to find a solution that provides the necessary funding to the sector without reducing accessibility or leaving the next generation of students with an enormous debt burden to shoulder.

We will provide additional emergency funding to students in need, and to better support students with disabilities. Eligibility for student grants will be assessed using the same means test that applies for social welfare payments. All colleges will be required to allow students to pay their student contribution by monthly direct debit, with no charge levied on this option. Income thresholds for student grants will be index-linked so that the value of these grants is not eroded by inflation. We will provide a new €60m fund to support postgraduate students.

A Living Wage for all in work

Work must always pay. Those in full-time work should be able to provide their families with a decent standard of living.

Labour took office shortly after Fianna Fáil had cut the minimum wage to €7.65 per hour. We immediately reversed that cut, and have implemented the recommendation of Labour's Low Pay Commission to increase the minimum wage from €7.65 to €9.15 per hour during our time in office, putting €3,000 a year into the pockets of those who need it most.

We will direct the Low Pay Commission to target a Minimum Wage of 60% of median earnings by 2021. This would be €11.30 per hour in today's value.

Our plan to ensure that the Government becomes a living wage employer, and to extend this requirement to those who provide services to it in onsite services such as security, cleaning and catering, will ensure that work pays, even for those on modest incomes.

Dignity at work

Our employment policy must strike the right balance between the needs of business and a worker's right to basic job security and a decent rate of pay.

Labour is the party of workers' rights. While other governments across the EU have restricted workers' rights, we broke new ground with collective bargaining legislation, which strengthens workers' legal rights to negotiate with employers. We also boosted protection for workers by reinstating the system of Registered Employment Agreements (REAs) and introduced the concept of Sectoral Employment Orders on a constitutionally sound basis. Already, 55,000 low paid security and contract cleaning staff have received a pay rise after binding wage agreements for both sectors were agreed under legislation enacted by this government.

- We will end abusive terms and conditions of employment including zero hour and insecure contracts, low pay, casualisation, and enforced bogus self-employment.
- We will ensure that anyone who works regular hours for a minimum period of 12 hours per week will be legally entitled to a written contract, and create better protection for workers who provide contracted services.
- We will confront the scourge of workplace bullying, and will put an end to arbitrary deductions from wages, contrary to the Payment of Wages Act. We will also safeguard the rights of workers in firms that collapse in an informal insolvency, and allow freelance workers to collectively bargain.

Where an individual works regular hours for a certain period, the employer will be legally required to issue a written contract guaranteeing their existing working pattern on an ongoing basis. The only exception would be where the individual requests to remain on flexible hours.

Employers will be required to provide workers with express notice, within a reasonable time, of their rosters and shifts. Generally, employees will not be called into work for shifts of less than four hours.



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Pathways to work

The Pathways to Work strategy has transformed social welfare from being just a provider of benefits to a public employment service that helps jobseekers find work, training and education. Some 140,000 jobs have been added in the economy since the peak of the crisis. Unemployment has fallen by more than one third, from over 15% to 8.6% now.

The next phase of our strategy will focus on jobless families and women who find it hard to even get into the labour market. We will ensure the social welfare system gives them the right support and incentives to re-enter the world of work so that they can build a better standard of living.

At a minimum we will increase welfare payments in line with the cost of living. We will move towards welfare individualisation – meaning spouses and partners of jobseekers are seen as welfare clients in their own right. So all working-age adults – including women and primary carers - will be given the same entitlements and opportunities.

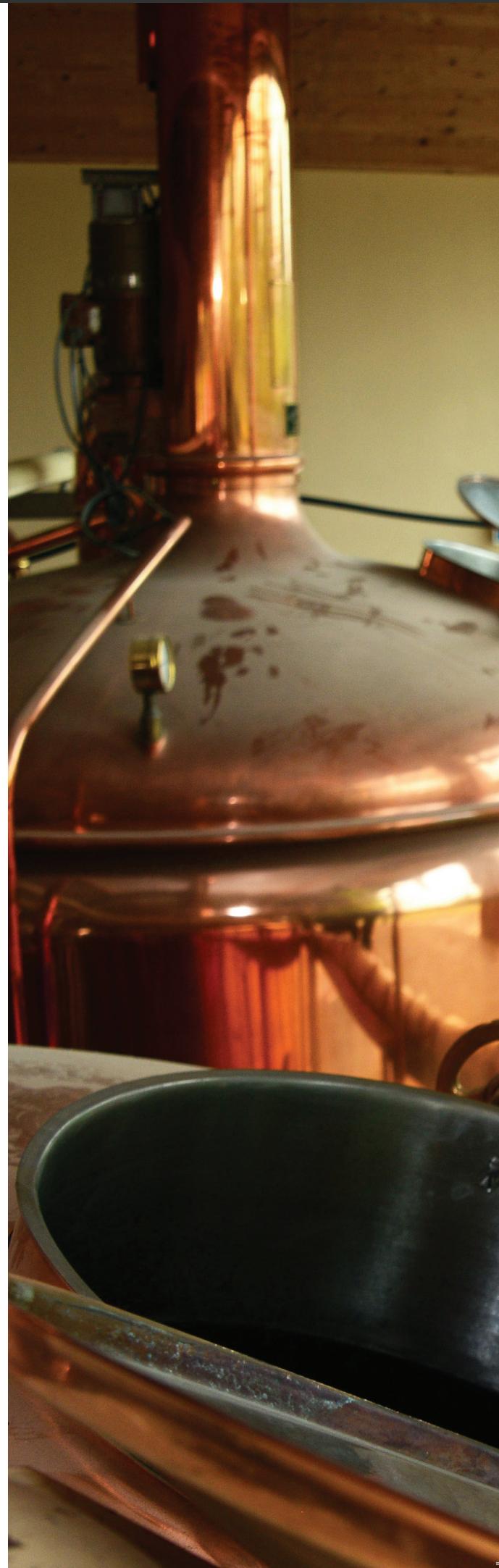
As a first step, we will ensure that in households dependent on one partner's jobseeker's payment, the right to work, training and education supports can be accessed by either partner. This will give more options to qualified adults currently frozen out of accessing labour supports.

We will expand the Youth Guarantee scheme to offer more training, education and employment opportunities to those under 26. For those participating in the Youth Guarantee, we will pay the full rate Jobseeker's payment.

We will also create 10,000 new places on JobsPlus – our highly successful programme which assists employers with wage costs when they hire a long-term unemployed person.

Supporting working families

The Family Income Supplement has continued to support many low-paid families to remain in work during the crisis, and has been a critical part of making sure that work always pays. However, this scheme is underused by families, and overly complex.





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WE WILL CREATE A NEW, SIMPLER, MORE SUPPORTIVE WORKING FAMILY BENEFIT SO THAT ALL PARENTS WORKING FULL TIME WILL EARN AT LEAST €12 PER HOUR. THIS WILL BETTER SUPPORT WORKING FAMILIES AND REMOVE DISINCENTIVES TO TAKING ON ADDITIONAL WORK

We will create a new, simpler, more supportive Working Family Benefit so that all parents working full time will earn at least €12 per hour. This will better support working families and remove disincentives to taking on additional work. We will reduce the 19 hours minimum hours of work required to receive Family Income Supplement. Instead we will ensure people qualify based on their income. Assessment for the Working Family Benefit will exempt some additional forms of income for single-parent families to better support their unique needs.

A new public sector pay deal

In Government, we have protected the principle of managing the public sector pay bill through negotiation, and the Lansdowne Road Agreement has begun the process of unwinding Fianna Fáil's public sector pay cuts.

We will negotiate a new public sector pay deal in advance of the conclusion of the Lansdowne Road agreement to deal with remaining unresolved issues arising from the FEMPI acts. We are committed to ensuring that the principle of equal pay scales for equal work in the public sector is an established one.

Supporting those who contribute

For a stronger welfare system that combines security with opportunity, we will take steps towards an income-linked system of jobseekers payments to empower workers to move between jobs and bounce back from short-term unemployment secure in the knowledge that the social welfare system will adequately support them and their families as they transition.

This income linked job seekers payment will amount to up to €30 a week extra above existing benefit levels, as a first step towards creating a system of contributory welfare that recognises that those who contribute to our social insurance fund should benefit when they need it most.

Costings

Policy measure	2021 Cost (current)
50,000 apprenticeships and traineeships	€131m
Free part-time education places	€46m
Ending JobBridge scheme	(€18m)
Cutting the student contribution by €500 from September 2017	€37m
Third level demographic funding	€75m
Third level staff/student ratio funding	€25m
Postgraduate supports and enhanced student assistance fund	€63m
Extra funding for Regional Skills Forums	€10m
Total	€369m



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